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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004831

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, G/TIP, EAP/RSP, INL, DRL/IL,
DRL/CRA
DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS USAID FOR ANE/TS - L. SAULS
LABOR FOR ILAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KWMN ELAB KCRM ECON SMIG RP

SUBJECT: MISSION PRESSES GRP FOR EXPEDITIOUS PROGRESS ON
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP)

REF: A. STATE 179822

1B. MANILA 3500
1C. MANILA 3011
1D. MANILA 2757

11. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified --
Please handle accordingly.

12. (SBU) Summary: Mission recently held several meetings with high-level GRP officials working to combat human trafficking to discuss problem areas identified in the 2004 TIP Report. We stressed the seriousness of the problem areas -- most particularly the lack of convictions of traffickers -- that led to the Tier 2 Watch List redesignation for the GRP. We also recommended key steps the GRP should take now for progress on TIP based on guidance in the Tier 2 Watch List Action Plan (ref A). GRP officials were responsive to the recommendations and promised remedial action to address the problem areas identified. Per Mission's TIP Working Group Meeting, we will continue to press the need for expeditious progress in meetings with GRP officials and NGOs planned in the next several weeks. End Summary.

Mission Presses Points with GRP Officials

13. (U) Mission recently held several meetings with high-level GRP officials involved in anti-trafficking in persons efforts. We used the meetings to underscore the seriousness of the trafficking problem and to propose concrete actions to address key concerns that led to the Philippines' Tier 2 Watch List rating in 2004. On October 1, Poloff had a frank discussion with Department of Justice Prosecutor Robert Larga, head of the Secretariat of the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT), and Severino Gana Jr., Chairman of the GRP's Task Force regarding Anti-Trafficking, on the current state of TIP prosecutions in the Philippines. Poloff conveyed deep concern over the lack of convictions under R.A. 9208, the Anti-Trafficking Law passed in 2003, despite the fact that several alleged traffickers have been arrested and several cases have been pending for long periods. Poloff noted reports that long delays in court cases were leading to opportunities for defendants and their associates to bribe witnesses to recant their testimony. There are also reports that threats are used.

14. (U) Larga and Gana acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, including the need to allocate additional government resources to prosecutions, and welcomed the suggested actions Poloff delivered in a non-paper. (Note: See ref A for specific non-paper requests, which included creating a more effective witness protection program; training police, judges, and public officials; and devoting additional law enforcement resources to fighting trafficking. End Note.) They promised to share the points within the DoJ and with other IACAT representatives and to report back by November on concrete steps the GRP is taking to address the USG's concerns. Poloff later reinforced the points in a meeting with Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zunio on October 6. Zunio said he welcomed ways to work with the USG on this issue.

15. (U) Additionally, we delivered ref A talking points to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Assistant Secretary Ariel Abadilla on October 3, noting areas in which the DFA could address the problem of trafficking, such as devoting increased resources to protecting overseas Filipino workers and cooperating with destination countries on repatriations. Mission plans to hold additional high-level meetings with GRP officials in the coming weeks as we continue to push for stronger Philippine government action in combating TIP.

TIP Working Group Works to Implement Action Plan

16. (U) On October 4, Mission's Inter-Agency TIP Working Group convened to review the USG's Tier 2 Watch List Action Plan for the Philippines. We discussed the best way to continue to execute the plan through the rest of the year. Participants from across the Mission identified key contacts throughout the GRP and NGO community to work with in spurring concrete action to combat both internal and external trafficking. A visiting USAID Management Specialist based in Washington joined the meeting, sharing practical ideas on how to engage the host government. Mission will continue to move forward with the Action Plan and to monitor closely the GRP's response.

Comment

17. (SBU) Now in its second year on the Tier 2 Watch List, the Philippines needs to show improvement on TIP or risk falling to Tier 3. We have emphatically made this point to high-level GRP officials who appear to understand the gravity of the situation. Due to resource constraints and long-standing problems with the judiciary, implementation of anti-TIP programs remains a serious problem for the GRP, however. The ongoing political turbulence also causes officials to lose focus on substantive objectives. Mission will continue to follow up at all levels within the GRP and the NGO community to reinforce the message that the USG is watching TIP closely and expects concrete improvements, especially in the area of prosecutions and convictions.